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Infant Physical Activity in Early Care and Education Settings

DID YOU KNOW

- Infants should be placed in safe settings that facilitate physical activity and do not restrict movement for prolonged periods of time.
- “Tummy Time” helps infants stretch and strengthen the head, neck, shoulder and back muscles they will need to learn important motor skills like how to push up, roll over, sit, crawl and pull to stand.
- Babies will develop their sensory-perceptual, social-emotional, problem solving, balance, visual and hearing abilities by being placed on their bellies.
- Babies who spend most of their time on their backs in infant seats or swings are at risk for developing flat spots on the backs of their heads.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Make sure infants spend plenty of time on their tummies, in the “prone” position, starting as newborns.
- Lay the infant over your leg while you are sitting on the floor.
- Lay the infant over a large exercise ball on his/her tummy and gently roll the ball back and forth, being sure to support the baby.
- Place the infant on her/his belly on a blanket on the floor.
- Roll up a towel to make a bolster. Place the bolster under the infant’s chest and armpits with her/his arms over the bolster. Move the infant gently back and forth on the bolster.
- Older infants can be placed lengthwise on the bolster and rolled gently from side to side.

MODELING HEALTHY BEHAVIORS

- Relationships are the key! Caregivers should interact with infants in daily physical activities promoting the exploration of their environment through movement.
- Movements include the eyes, head turning from side to side, bringing hands or feet together, reaching with hands, arms and feet, batting with hands and kicking.
- Have fun with the baby during daily routines like diapering, feeding and dressing.
- During tummy time, get down on the floor with the baby.
- Lie down with the infant on your chest, tummy-side down.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Make tummy time interesting through movements or change of toys (rattles, cloth dolls).
- Use music periodically to add to the baby’s interest.
- Try tummy time for several short periods during the day until he/she is used to being on his/her belly. Increase the frequency and duration as the baby becomes comfortable.
- Check out websites like www.zerotothree.org for more information and physical activities for infants.



Toddler Physical Activity in Early Care and Education Settings

DID YOU KNOW

- Toddlers should engage in a minimum of 30 minutes throughout each day of structured physical activity.
- Toddlers should engage in at least 60 minutes and up to several hours daily of unstructured physical activity.
- Toddlers should develop movement skills that are building blocks for more complex movement tasks: (Ex: run, roll, walk, climb, jump, slide, push and pull.)
- Toddlers should not be sedentary for more than 60 minutes at a time, except when they are sleeping.
- Walkers, exer-saucers, swings and buggies are not recommended for young children because the equipment restricts the ability to explore and learn.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Provide opportunities for children to develop their gross motor skills indoors and outdoors with materials such as balls, push/pull toys, large blocks and riding toys.
- Give children who are crawling or walking additional items to play with that enhance their physical activity such as tunnels to crawl through and slides.
- Incorporate movement into story time by including stories of active children and adults.
- Explore the way the body moves by dancing to familiar songs like *Hokey Pokey* and *Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear*.
- Create an obstacle course for toddlers to explore physically.
- Arrange your room so that toddlers can move freely and safely.

MODEL HEALTHY BEHAVIORS

- Let children see how you move throughout the day: You are walking, bending, lifting, climbing, running, jumping, dancing, kicking the ball and even rolling on the floor!

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Encourage movement throughout the day, naturally incorporating all the developmental movements in the context of your relationships with each child and in daily routines and transitions.



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Preschooler Physical Activity in Early Care and Education Settings

DID YOU KNOW

- Physical activity patterns developed in childhood tend to last through adulthood.
- Preschoolers should engage in daily physical activity that promotes health related fitness and movement skills, one to three hours or more per day.
- Activities such as running and climbing develop muscles, strength, endurance and general movement skills, and are also beneficial for preschooler's cognitive and emotional development.
- Preschoolers should not be sedentary for more than an hour at a time, except when sleeping.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Learn about and provide opportunities for children to develop fundamental motor skills (moving the body from one point to another) and manipulative skills (moving objects with their hands and feet.)
- Provide opportunities for children to develop their gross motor skills indoors and outdoors.
- Provide appropriate materials for children to practice their development skills.
- Focus on participation, not competition.

MODEL HEALTHY BEHAVIORS

- Let children see how you move throughout the day: You are walking, bending, lifting, climbing, running, dancing, kicking the ball and even rolling on the floor!

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Include physical activities in your lesson plans.
- Integrate physical activities into other domains of learning: During story time, at learning centers, and during transitions.



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